

# Big Lake

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

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**Big Lake NWR**  
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### Refuge Facts

- Established: 1915.
- Acres: 11,038.
- Located in Mississippi County, AR 18 miles west of the Mississippi River.
- Other management: conservation easement—one in Green County; fee title tracts—two in three counties totaling 151 acres. Wilderness area of 2,100 acres. National Natural Landmark of 5,000 acres.
- Location: the refuge is located on Highway 18, 2 miles east of Manila.

### Natural History

- Refuge was once a portion of the Mississippi River; but now the Little River flows through it.
- The New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-12 created the characteristics that made it a hunter/fisherman paradise. An extensive network of man-made ditches in the Missouri Bootheel drains approximately 2,000 square miles of farmland directly through the refuge detrimentally affecting the area.
- Concentrations of wintering and migrating ducks.
- Bald eagle and osprey nests.
- Swamp 5,250 acres; open water 2,600 acres; bottomland hardwoods; 2,100 acres; marsh 300 acres; moist soil plants 250 acres; cropland 32 acres.

### Financial Impact of Refuge

- Three-person staff.
- 25,000 visitors annually.
- Current budget (FY 98) \$170,900.

### Refuge Objectives

- Provide habitat for wintering migratory waterfowl and other birds.
- Provide habitat for nesting wood ducks.
- Provide environmental education/interpretation opportunities to the public.
- Provide recreational (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation) opportunities for the public.

### Management Tools

- Water management for waterfowl, marsh and water birds and shorebirds.
- Forest management for neotropical birds.
- Mechanical/chemical control of undesirable plants.
- Farming.
- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships.
- Commercial fishing for rough fish.
- Trapping to reduce problem beavers.

### Public Use Opportunities

- Wildlife drive.
- Observation point.
- Wildlife observation.
- Fishing.
- Frogging.
- Hunting.
- Boating.
- Photography.

### Calendar of Events

**March-October:** fishing.

**April-October:** frogging.

**May:** International Migratory Bird Day.

**June:** National Fishing Week.

**September-October:** squirrel hunting.

**October:** National Wildlife Week; raccoon hunting.

**November-December:** archery deer hunting.

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## Questions and Answers

*When does fishing open/close?*

The lake opens to the public March 1 and closes October 31.

*When do the hunting seasons open?*

Squirrel—From beginning of the State's fall season through October 31.

Raccoon—Noon October 18 until midnight October 31.

Deer (archery)—November 1 through December 31.

*Why is the refuge keeping water levels so low we don't have water in our hunting areas?*

That area is managed by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and questions should be addressed to 870/972 5438.

*General questions on management and hunting/fishing on Big Lake Wildlife Management Area.*

Management of fall water levels must fall in the range of the "Standing Instructions to the Project Manager for Water Control" which was set forth by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in agreement with Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Missouri Department of Conservation, Little River Drainage District and the City of Hornersville, Missouri.

Water levels at the higher targeted levels can not be reached unless under flood conditions, due to the weir in Ditch 28 being too low to dam back water and the levee on the north and east side of the refuge being too low in spots to hold back the water.

Water level management by the refuge is geared to providing maximum water levels to adjacent Big Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and lands north in Missouri without jeopardizing refuge facilities and upstream landowners.

*Do you allow camping?*

No.